DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 206 086 EA 013 825

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TITLE Teachers' and Principals' Attitudes about the Characteristics and Functions of Middle Schools.
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Educational Research Association (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Role; Curriculum Development; Educational Facilities Improvement; Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; *Middle Schools; National Surveys; Principals; Questionnaires; *School Attitudes; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS National Middle School Study

ABSTRACT

Using an attitudinal questionnaire, the National Middle School Study surveyed 153 principals and 567 teachers in "exemplary" middle schools in 37 states. The questionnaire sought to learn the respondents' attitudes concerning the needs or functions of middle school students, teachers, principals, curricula, facilities, and organization. Middle schools selected for inclusion in the survey were those identified as successful by state education departments and other educational authorities. Among the survey's findings were that teachers judged principals by their helpfulness in promoting effective classroom teaching; principals encouraged teacher involvement in school decision-making; teachers and principals favored emphasizing basic skills in the curriculum; and both groups desired to enlarge middle school facilities to include shops, laboratories, and enrichment classrooms. A copy of the survey questionnaire is appended to the document. (RW)

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ED206086

TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES ABOUT THE CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS OF MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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A paper presented at
Eastern Educational Research
Association Convention

March, 1980

EA 013 325

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TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF FUNCTIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

Introduction

The National Middle School Study was originated and conducted during the 1977-1978 and 1978-1979 academic school years. The research study consisted of two components: (1) an information survey to collect and describe the workings of middle schools as seen by national leaders, State Department of Education coordinators, principals of exemplary middle schools and teachers of middle schools; and (2) an attitudinal questionnaire to collect information about the perceptions of the national leaders, coordinators, principals, and teachers indicated above toward certain functions and characteristics of the middle school relating to students, teachers, principals, curriculum, facilities and organization. The principals' and teachers' responses to five subcategories from the attitudinal questionnaire will form the focus for this paper.

Description of the Study

Sample

This paper will report the results from the attitudinal study based on the 153 principals (63.7%) and 567 teachers (72.5%) who responded to the questionnaire. The respondents represented thirty-seven states.

The principal sample was selected from middle schools previously indentified as exemplary middle schools by a number of educational authorities including national leaders, State Department of Education coordinators, professional organizations and educational literature. The term, exemplary, implied middle schools which were recognized by the previously cited educational authorities as employing successful middle school practice. The authors of this study recognize the limitations and inadequacies of compiling a representative list of exemplary middle schools from the various educational authorities. In some instances, exemplary middle schools may have been omitted from consideration and still others may not have responded to the study.

The teacher sample was selected by sending a follow-up letter to principals in exemplary middle schools (who had already responded to this study) asking their permission to sample six to ten of their classroom teachers. If permission was given, principals were asked to select teachers and one counselor according to the following criteria: (1) all grades found in the school were represented in the teachers selected, (2) all subject areas taught in the school were represented, (3) the questionnaire was shown to teachers and their approval obtained before principals recommended them, and (4) a list containing the participants' names was returned to the investigators who in turn sent the questionnaire to the designated teachers.

Instrument

A questionnaire of 57 Likert items was designed from various educational resources including educational literature, doctoral dissertation, various middle school studies and ERIC searches. The instrument was designed to determine the attitude of middle school principals and teachers toward the functions and characteristics of the middle school with respect to the five school components: students (10 items), teachers (13 items), principals (12 items), curriculum (12 items), and facilities and organization (10 items). (See Appendix I). The classroom teachers were asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), disagreed (D), or strongly disagreed (SD), with the attitudinal statements. The responses were coded as follows: SA=4, A=3, D=2, and SD=1. Thus, a high score indicated a positive endorsement of a statement while a low score represented a weak endorsement. The principals and teachers were instructed to reflect the actual middle school operations and practices rather than the ideal practices in their responses.

A pilot questionnaire was field tested by professional educators representing middle school principals and teachers, graduate students enrolled in classes in middle school education at the University of South Carolina, College of Education Faculty and a State Department of Education coordinator. The professional educators' reactions formed the basis from which the instrument was revised. The revised questionnaire was mailed to 240 principals of exemplary middle schools in November, 1977. A follow-up mailing was completed in January, 1978. The same questionnaire was mailed to the 782 teachers in April, 1978. A follow-up mailing was completed in October, 1978.

Methods of Analysis

The data analyses were concerned with providing a comprehensive description of the principals' and teachers' responses. The analyses included an examination of the frequency of responses across the five categories for each item, examination of the mean item responses, intercorrelation of the items, factor analysis of items both within and across the five major areas and an investigation of the responses aggregated within the five major areas. Regional differences were also examined.

The primary analysis described in the paper will focus on the mean item responses. The mean item response for each item of each sample was calculated and the items were then rank ordered for each sample within the five subcategories from the item with the highest mean response to the item with the lowest mean response. Within each subcategory the three items with the highest mean responses were operationally defined as receiving strong endorsement. The three items with the lowest mean response were operationally defined as receiving a weak endorsement. It is important to note that while three items are operationally defined as having received a weak endorsement this is based on a relative comparison and does not imply a negative endorsement. The top three items will be discussed as the most strongly endorsed statements, the lowest ranking three items will be discussed as receiving a weak endorsement.

Findings

Before describing the principals' and teachers' responses, it is important to provide a brief description of the measurement properties of the questionnaire. First, the internal consistency reliability was calculated using the Cronbach Alpha Index of Reliability. The internal responses--(1) students (.9313), (2) teachers (.9308), (3) principals (.9290), curriculum (.9573), facilities and organization (.8625); and teachers' responses--(1) students (.7142), (2) teachers (.7457), (3) principals (.7600), (4) curriculum (.7797), and facilities and organization (.6919). Second, the dimensionality of the five subcategories was examined by means of factor analysis with varimax rotation. The factor analysis reveals strong within scale item homogeneity for both principals and teachers. For the student, principal and curriculum subcategories the factor analysis revealed a single unidimensional factor in both groups' responses. The subcategory dealing with the teacher contained thirteen items that loaded on two factors. The major factor contained twelve items and dealt with classroom management and the second factor contained one item and dealt with teacher responsibilities. For the facilities and organization subcategory there were two factors: the major factor contained nine items which were concerned with general physical facilities and organizational procedures and the second factor contained one item which dealt with organizational practice.

Subcategories

The frequencies and means for each of the 57 Likert items are shown in Appendix I. For each item in the five subcategories the mean responses were calculated for the principal (MP) and teacher (MT) responses. Within each of the five subcategories the items were rank ordered from the item with the highest mean response to the item with the lowest mean response for both principals (PE) and teachers (TE) groups. The top three items in each subcategory for each responding group will be separately discussed as receiving a strong endorsement; the lowest ranking three items will be discussed as receiving weak endorsement. A comparison of the similarities and differences between principals' and teachers' responses will be reported.

Student Subcategory

In the student subcategory both principals and teachers indicated strongest endorsement on the need for basic skills (MP = 3.415), (MT = 3.220). The second strong endorsement by principals was on the development of a healthy self-concept (MP = 3.405), whereas, teachers stressed students learning to learn (MT = 3.168). The third area of strong endorsement by principals was on encouraging satisfactory personal and social adjustment (MP = 3.346), in contrast, to teachers who stressed the need for development of a healthy self-concept (MT = 3.101).

The response items for which principals expressed weak endorsement were maximizing the individual's academic development (MP = 3.039), encouraging individual initiative and effort directed toward cognitive achievement (MP = 3.157), and stressing skills necessary for survival in society (MP = 3.176). In contrast, teachers expressed weak endorsements for providing

learning experiences directed toward the development of good citizens (MT = 2.841), stressing skills necessary for survival in society (MT = 2.850), and providing the discipline necessary for student learning (MT = 2.910).

It would appear that specific quantitiative statements like those in the preceding sentence were no longer considered defensible student goals by middle school principals and teachers. Terms like citizenship and discipline seem to elicit less support than they would have a decade ago. Both principals and teachers indicated a need for basic skills and a healthy self-concept. From the principals' perspective there appeared to be a need for more personal and social adjustment, whereas, the classroom teacher seemed to place more emphasis on students learning to learn.

Teacher Subcategory

In the teacher subcategory principals indicated that the highest endorsement should be placed on the teacher's willingness to support guidance and counseling services (MP = 3.340), second endorsement, was the teacher's willingness to assume a variety of teaching roles (MP = 3.327), and third, was the utilization of team planning and teaching (MP = 3.307). Conversely, teachers saw their primary responsibility as assuming a variety of teaching roles (MT = 3.238). Their strong endorsement of guidance and counselor services was considered second in importance (MT = 3.224). The third area of endorsement was that the teachers utilize a variety of instructional techniques in their teaching (MT = 3.171).

In contrast, principals and teachers gave their weakest endorsement to teacher's participation in state and national meetings (MP = 2.732), (MT = 2.668), second weak endorsement to the application of educational research findings in the classroom (MP = 2.752), (MT = 2.707), and third weak endorsement to the establishment of a climate of student freedom and self-directed learning (MP = 2.843), (MT = 2.750).

Teachers emphasized a variety of teaching roles as being important in the classroom, whereas, principals stressed the teacher's support for the guidance and counseling services. From the principals' responses toward the guidance item it was not possible to determine whether the classroom teacher in the middle school should be further trained for the guidance and counseling services. The only areas strongly endorsed by one of the responding groups were the utilization of team planning and teaching (endorsed by principals only), and the need for a variety of instructional techniques for the classroom (endorsed by teachers only). It would appear that principals responded to the teacher subcategory from the responsibility of the building principal for instructional evaluation. On the other hand, teachers based their responses on the evaluation criteria for effective classroom teaching. Teachers did not see their classroom effectiveness being evaluated by their attendance at state and national meetings or by the application of research findings in their classrooms. The failure to encourage attendance at state and national meetings and the application of research findings to the classroom may in part account for why innovations and changes take so long to be implemented into the classrooms.

Principal Subcategory

Within the principal subcategory the building principal saw his strongest endorsement as the involvement of staff in solving school problems (MP = 3.471). His instructional leadership role was considered as second in importance (MP = 3.412). The third strong endorsement expressed the concern that principals possess previous teaching experience at the middle or junior high school level (MP = 3.261). Conversely, teachers indicated that the first priority for strong endorsement in the principal subcategory should be on principals participating in state and national meetings and conferences (MT = 3.136). The teachers' second strong endorsement dealt with the principal's willingness to utilize staff in solving school problems (MT = 3.086). The third strong endorsement was the provision for a planned system of parental involvement on a regular basis (MT = 2.965).

In comparison, principals indicated weak endorsement for the utilization of management principals based on systems design (MP = 2.536), participation of principals in school board meetings (MP = 2.705), and involvement of teachers in the selection of faculty and staff (MP = 2.797) as prerequisites to the administration of a successful middle school. Teachers, on the other hand, gave weak endorsement to the principal's involvement of teachers in the selection of faculty and staff (MT = 2.307), the utilization of management principles based on systems design (MT = 2.545), and participation of the principal in school board meetings (MT = 2.626).

The findings indicated that teachers see the principal's major leadership role as facilitating classroom teacher's effectiveness by participation of the principal in state and national meetings and involvement of staff in solving school problems. In contrast, the results of the study indicate that the principals were primarily concerned with providing instructional leadership through direct teacher involvement. It is interesting to note that with the stress placed on team teaching and planning in middle schools one would assume that both teachers and principals would strongly endorse teachers' participation in staff selection processes. However, neither principals nor teachers supported teacher's participation in staff selection processes

Curriculum Subcategory

In the curriculum subcategory principals and teachers were in agreement concerning the strongest endorsement, development and refinement of basic skills (MP = 3.454), (MT = 3.145), and second endorsement, sequence of in subject matter (MP = 3.307), (MT = 3.063). Principals gave the notion of a balanced curriculum their third endorsement (MP = 3.288) while teachers gave their third endorsement to continuous progress (MT = 3.009).

Principals and teachers gave their weakest endorsement to the item dealing with core curriculum (MP = 2.582), (MT = 2.457). Principals gave their second weak endorsement to provisions for exploratory programs in career education (MP = 2.948), in contrast to teachers who gave second weak endorsement to the establishment of specific classes for exceptional children (MT = 649).

Principals indicated their third item of weak endorsement was the establishment of specific classes for exceptional children (MP = 2.987), whereas, teachers gave weak endorsement to the provision for exploratory programs in career education (MT = 2.693).

Both principals and teachers were in agreement concerning their strongest two endorsements stressing basic skills and sequencing of subject matter. Even with the "Back to the Basics" movement the principals continued to stress the need for a balanced curriculum while, in contrast, teachers appeared to view the curriculum for an instructional standpoint advocating from an instructional standpoint advocating varied and continuous progress. Neither principals or teachers strongly endorsed the need for a core curriculum. The fact that the principals and teachers did not stress the expansion of classes for exceptional children would appear to reflect the acceptance of the concept of mainstreaming.

Facilities and Organization Subcategory

In this subcategory principals and teachers were in agreement concerning their highest endorsement, broadening the program to include shops, labs and special enrichment classrooms (MP = 3.373), (MT = 3.192). Principals gave their second the third endorsements to individualized instruction (MP = 3.183) and team teaching (3.169), whereas, teachers agreed but reversed their endorsements giving their second endorsement to team teaching (MT = 3..018) and their third endorsement to individualized instruction (MT = 2.899).

Principals and teachers were in agreement concerning their weakest, maintaining the self-contained classroom for grades 5 and 6 (MP = 2.092), (MT = 2.000), and second weakest endorsement, introducing departmentalization at grades 5 and 6 (MP = 2.431), MMT = 2.584). Principals gave ability grouping their third weakest endorsement (MP = 2.732) while teachers gave providing for transition between the self-contained classroom and departmentalization their third lowest endorsement (MT = 2.616).

In a time of declining enrollments and the "Back to the Basics" movement, it would appear difficult to convince the public of the need for additional building space for shops, laboratories and learning centers unless the justification can be linked with improving the basic skills. The mean item responses of the subcategory indicated a greater range of disagreement over the necessary facilities and organization required for a middle school. Transition, one of the key functions of a middle school, was given weak endorsement by principals and teachers.

Regional Variation

The thirty-seven states represented in the two samples were divided into seven regions which included New England, Mid-Atlantic, South, Midwest, Southwest, Rocky Mountains and Far West. These were used an independent variables in a one way analysis of variance. The dependent variables were the five subcategory totals. There were no significant differences in any of these analysis in either sample.

Conclusions

In summary, the study provides a broad description of the principals' and teachers' perceptions of functions and characteristics of exemplary middle school teachers and principals. The major substantive conclusions seem to indicate:

(1) teachers viewed the principal's leadership role from the perspective of whether their response would promise effective classroom teaching.

(2) teachers responded to the attitudinal questionnaire according to how they were evaluated and judged as successful teachers.

(3) principals responded to the attitudinal questionnaire from the perspective of providing effective instructional leadership in their schools.

(4) principals encouraged direct teacher involvement in decision making as the key to effective instructional leadership.

(5) teachers saw themselves assuming a variety of teaching roles and assisting with the guidance and counselor services and, similarly, both were strongly endorsed by principals with guidance and counseling receiving a stronger endorsement.

(6) neither principals or teachers strongly endorsed teacher's attendance at state and national meetings.

(7) teachers' and principals' responses indicated that building principals should utilize teachers in solving school problems but neither group endorsed principals involving teachers in staff selections even though the middle school concept emphasized team planning and teaching.

(8) principals and teachers did not strongly support the current emphasis at the national level on training teachers specifically for working with early adolescents.

(9) neither principals or teachers saw the need for utilizing educational research findings in the classroom

(10) principals and teachers emphasized basic skills but at the same time principals stressed the need for maintaining a balanced curriculum.

(11) neither principals or teachers emphasized self-contained or departmentalization at grades 5 and 6.

Finally, it would appear that the middle school concept as described in the literature is being currently practiced in a variety of ways. This study pointed out the need for additional empirical descriptions of what principals and teachers actually do in middle schools.

Appendix I

Appendix I contains a sample of the questionnaire used in this study. For each question, the Appendix shows (1) mean response of principals (MP), (2) mean response of teachers (MT), (3) the three strongest endorsements (lowest numbers) and three weakest endorsements (highest numbers) for principals (PE) and (4) the three strongest endorsements (lowest numbers) and three weakest endorsements (highest numbers) for teachers (TE).

The study seeks to determine the attitude of educators toward certain functions and characteristics of middle schools. You will be asked to respond to statements concerning students, teachers, principals, curriculum, and organization. Your responses should reflect your attitudes toward middle schools as they actually operate not as they ought to operate. Responses to the questionnaire will be completely confidential.

DIRECTIONS: Check the category, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD) which represents your reaction to the functions and characteristics of the middle school in actual operation.

The Student

MP	MT	PE	TE	For the student, the middle school . . .
3.294	3.168	__	2	Focuses on students learning to learn
3.261	3.012	__	__	Helps in the formulation of personal values and moral standards
3.345	3.090	3	__	Fosters satisfactory personal and social adjustment
3.405	3.101	2	3	Fosters the development of a health self-concept
3.288	2.910	__	8	Provides the discipline necessary for student learning
3.157	3.034	9	__	Encourages individual initiative and effort directed toward cognitive achievement
3.176	2.850	8	9	Stresses the skills necessary for survival in society
3.451	3.220	1	1	Emphasizes reading, writing, and arithmetic skills as basic to individual development
3.183	2.841	__	10	Maximizes the individual's academic development
3.039	3.026	10	__	Provides learning experiences directed toward the development of a good citizen

The Teacher

MP	MT	PE	TE	The middle school teacher . . .
3.248	3.153	__	__	Establishes a creative learning environment for early adolescents
3.340	3.224	1	2	Supports the guidance and counseling services
3.194	3.090	__	__	Implements variable groups--large/small, multiage, alternative, etc.
3.307	3.056	3	__	Utilizes team planning and team teaching
2.843	2.750	11	11	Establishes a climate of student freedom and self-directed learning
3.143	2.954	__	__	Provides for, insists upon, and is accountable for student academic achievement
3.327	3.238	2	1	Assumes a variety of teaching roles--facilitator, manager, resource, etc.
3.261	3.171	__	__	Utilizes a variety of instructional techniques--peer teaching, simulations and games, inquiry, etc.
3.294	3.144	__	__	Communicates effectively to parents concerning the child's performance in the school program
2.732	2.688	13	13	Participates in state and national meetings and conferences
2.752	2.707	12	12	Applies the findings of educational research to classroom teaching
3.209	3.032	__	__	Works to design learning activities and strategies to meet the diverse learning styles of the students
3.026	3.014	__	__	Establishes a climate of classroom discipline and teacher-directed learning

YOUR RESPONSES SHOULD REFLECT ACTUAL MIDDLE SCHOOL OPERATION

The Principal

MP	MT	PE	TE	The middle school principal . . .
2.705	2.626	11	10	Participates in school board decision making processes
2.536	2.545	12	11	Utilizes management principles based on systems design
3.412	2.829	2		Provides instructional leadership in middle school programs
3.052	2.869			Employs teachers trained in teaching early adolescents
3.261	2.947	3		Possesses previous teaching experience in middle or junior high schools
3.120	2.945			Develops and controls the budget for his school
3.092	2.965		3	Provides a system for parent input on a regular basis
3.118	2.822			Employs or has the final decision in the employment of faculty/staff
2.797	2.307	10	12	Involves teachers in the selection of faculty/staff
3.227	3.136		1	Participates in state and national meetings and conferences
3.084	2.907			Applies the findings of educational research to school administration
3.471	3.086	1	2	Utilizes staff in solving school problems

The Curriculum

MP	MT	PE	TE	The middle school curriculum . . .
3.307	3.063	2	2	Requires depth, breadth and sequence in subject matter
3.454	3.145	1	1	Continues the development and refinement of basic skills
3.013	2.765			Focuses on competencies as the basis for curriculum design
3.283	2.924	3		Encourages a proportional balance between subject matter and exploration in elective areas, the fine arts, and career education
3.203	3.009		3	Provides for varied and continous progress in subject matter
2.987	2.649	10	11	Establishes specific classes for all types of exceptional children
3.163	2.825			Considers both child-centered and subject-centered concerns in a balanced curriculum
3.131	2.988			Encourages participation in activities--clubs, student government, dramatics, recreation, etc.
3.013	2.720			Focuses on humanistic concerns as the basis for curriculum design
3.000	2.891			Provides for mastery achievement in skills and concepts
2.948	2.693	11	10	Provides for exploration and training in career education
2.582	2.457	12	12	Focuses on the core curriculum concept as the basis for curriculum design

Facilities and Organization

MP	MT	PE	TE	Regarding facilities and organization, the middle school . . .
2.732	2.785	8		Provides for homogeneous or ability grouping
3.169	3.018	3	2	Provides for team teaching
2.856	2.651			Establishes flexible/modular scheduling
2.092	2.000	10	10	Maintains the self-contained classroom for grades 5 and/or 6
3.007	2.616		8	Provides for transition between the self-contained classroom and departmentalization
2.431	2.584	9	9	Introduces departmentalization at grades 5 and/or 6
2.856	2.617			Fosters alternative school programs to meet the needs of students
3.183	2.899	2	3	Encourages developments in individualized instruction, independent study, learning centers, and the like
2.948	2.829			Requires a building permitting flexible, multi-purpose utilization
3.373	3.192	1	1	Broadens the program to include shops, labs, and special enrichment classrooms